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City stresses importance of outdoors

By Lauren Weber, The Press-Tribune

Getting kids to spend more time outdoors might sound like an easy task. But some youth find it difficult to be pried away from video games, television shows and the computer.

That's where Mike Shellito, Roseville's community services director/ assistant city manager, comes in. Shellito asked city council members at last week's meeting, to adopt a plan to get kids outside – to play a sport, to take a hike or to ride a bike. He has made it the city's month-long mission to encourage outdoor activity.

The city adopted The California Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights that encourages kids and families to complete nine outdoor activities this summer in conjunction with July being named Parks and Recreation month.

Besides improving health and happiness, kids who play outdoors are less stressed and actually smarter, Shellito said.

"Kids that go outside and explore nature are smarter kids in school and they have a greater connection with the natural environment," he said.

Reasoning behind the lack of outdoor activity for children, teens and adults is strongly blamed on technology.

"Some sort of sad but true statistics are that children in the United States average three to four hours of TV per day versus two to three hours per week of active play and exercise," Shellito said. "Sedentary lifestyles have created health problems for kids; nearly one in three children born in the year of 2000 will develop type 2 diabetes in their lifetime. That's a really scary statistic for us."

But Roseville is doing its part to encourage getting outside as a family and councilmembers praised the idea.

Councilman John Allard is aware of the importance of outdoor activity and encourages it within his family.

"It is important, I spend a lot of time with my kids doing things outdoors because I enjoy it but also because we have so much here in Roseville that we can do outdoors," he said. "I would just encourage parents to take their kids out and take advantage of all the incredible parks and bike trails and all the other things that we have here."

Councilman Richard Rocucci suggested leaving technology's distractions behind while outside. He said he leaves the television and computer at home and believes it's healthy to get out and experience something different.

And Roseville offers ample ways for residents to do that. By the end of the year, the city will have 60 developed parks, Shellito said. In addition to that, Roseville is home to 5,400 acres of parks and open space, 27 miles of off-street bike trails and 60 miles of creeks, making Roseville a prime backdrop to complete the bill of rights.

The bill of rights activities include exploring nature, learning to swim, following a trail, catching a fish, playing on a team and playing in a safe place.

One of the activities: Discover California's past, couldn't have come at a better time according to Shellito.

"I think it's really fitting that this year is our centennial and we've got a lot of history to celebrate not only in Roseville but really throughout the state of California," he said.

Children and families have a mission this summer: to complete the bill of rights form, take a photo while completing one of the activities and returning the form to be placed in a drawing. At the Kid's Health and Fitness Expo Sept. 28, they have the opportunity to win prizes. The only qualification is to get outside and have fun.

For more information on the city's bill of rights, go to www.roseville.ca.us/getactive.